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**HOW THIRD GRADE STUDENTS RESPOND TO THE MULTIPLE  
PERSPECTIVES IN READ ALOUDS OF CRITICAL TEXTS**

by

Kathryn Zeck

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University  
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Thesis Advisor: Susan Browne, Ph.D.

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## **Dedications**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful parents, Jeff and Charla, whose support and guidance has helped me to achieve every goal I set for myself. Thank you both for your unwavering love and encouragement throughout this entire Master's program.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Abstract**

Kathryn Zeck

HOW THIRD GRADE STUDENTS RESPOND TO THE MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES  
IN READ ALOUDS OF CRITICAL TEXTS

2018-2019

Susan Browne, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to examine how students respond to weekly read alouds of critical literacy texts. The specific aim was to see what type of critical stances students adopt as they respond to the multiple perspectives present in the texts. Student written reflections, audio recording of student talk, and anecdotal notes are all analyzed. The implications for implementing weekly read alouds of critical literacy texts as it relates to students' social awareness are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

As with every new year, I saw the start of the 2018-19 school year as an opportunity for a clean slate, new beginnings and a chance to positively impact the lives of my students to the best of my ability. However, this year was a little different. I entered this new school year with a changed mindset. Not only did I want my students to grow academically, socially and emotionally, but I also wanted them to become more socially conscious, and aware of the inequalities present in our society and how to address them. Over the course of the past year, I began to consider it my responsibility as an educator to help my students grow into culturally-competent, tolerant and accepting human beings that are able to analyze texts and new literacies for biases and multiple perspectives. Through this work, I also grew as an educator. I was able to imbed critical literacy pedagogy into my repertoire of instructional practices and I learned about the importance of providing students a space to authentically respond to texts that deliberately foreground multiple perspectives and sociopolitical issues.

I have always strived to ensure that I teach the academic curriculum while also adequately addressing my students social/emotional needs. During my time as an undergraduate, I learned from experienced and highly effective teachers about the importance of creating a class community where students feel respected, valued and able to effectively manage their emotions and conflicts with peers. As a result, I enter each year with the mindset that if these areas of my classroom management and instruction are continually reinforced, then teaching the academic curriculum will be that much easier. In my classroom, I implemented responsive classroom techniques including a morning

meeting routine where students were able to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2014). Here, we were able to build a class community, learn about each other's lives, and gain an appreciation for one another and our differences. Despite these strategies as well as weekly character education lessons derived from a program purchased by my school district, I found that my students still lacked the social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making necessary to eliminate issues of harassment, teasing and bullying which seemed to creep into my classroom each year. I knew that I had to do something more.

Literacy has always been a large part of my life, and so when reflecting on how I might create the change I wished to see in my classroom, I looked to high quality children's literature for support. As the child of a language arts teacher, I grew up loving to read and, overtime, I developed an appreciation for the insight into other cultures and ways of life that books are able to provide. What I now know is that as well-intentioned as my morning meetings were, in order to help my students become more inclusive, tolerant people, and ultimately, agents of social justice, they must learn to address implicit biases and systematic oppression. For this reason, I planned to use children's books as a way to provide students with a window into the lives and cultures of those different from their own, and to build their overall empathy and social awareness.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how critical literacy read alouds support students' ability to demonstrate critical perspectives toward the text. Specifically, this study will investigate how these read alouds can be used to help

students examine a text for biases, perspectives, and missing voices, as well as increase their cultural-competency, tolerance and respect for differences.

Critical literacy plays an important role in students' development as literate citizens, specifically in the 21st century. In a society where anyone is able to generate and share content, students must be able to examine the credibility of a text as well as the author's perspective and biases. To do this, students should be provided opportunities to critique the text and question the status quo. The International Literacy Association (ILA) also stressed the importance of critical literacy pedagogies in its 2017 Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals. Here, the standards focus on critical literacy skills which include teaching students to "critique ideas, affect social change, and empower themselves to make a difference in their own and in others' lives," (International Literacy Association, 2018). The association asserts that effective teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of critical pedagogies that apply to diversity and equity in literacy education. My inquiry contributes to the call for more research on the effects of critical literacy pedagogies.

Critical literacy describes the stances that readers take when reading a text. This theory of reading stems from Paulo Freire's beliefs that pedagogy denounces structures of oppression through the development of conscientização, or students' critical consciousness and ability to "perceive social, political and economic contradictions and take action against the oppressive elements of reality," (Freire, 1970, p. 17). Freire advocated that education should not merely consist of depositing information into the minds of students, but should involve a collaborative, dialogic approach to instruction where students and teachers construct knowledge together. Shor and Giroux also

theorized that critical literacy has the power to promote social justice by challenging the status quo, exploring multiple perspectives, examining relationships, and identifying dynamics of power. These theories can be put into practice through the use of critical literacy texts which “invite teachers and students to move away from passive reading and become more actively engaged in texts,” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 384). Any text can become a critical text when used in a way that consists of questioning the text and prompting students to think about social issues and engage in praxis, which is where students reflect and take action upon the world in order to transform it. Through these texts, students can “consider how power and positioning impacts how different perspectives are listened to and represented, not just in these texts but in their lives as well,” (Clarke & Whitney, 2009, p. 534). Interpreting texts through a critical lens can also help students become aware of the messages that texts communicate about power, race, and gender, who should receive privileges, and who has been or continues to be oppressed. As students learn how to engage in critical literacy, they also “become more aware of their views and how their views influence their interpretations of texts and interactions with people,” (Hall & Piazza, 2008, p. 32).

One study that I found early in my research describes the four dimensions of critical literacy. These dimensions include: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focusing on sociopolitical issues; and taking action and prompting social justice. The authors of this study found that these dimensions can be used to “redefine literacy as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that increase opportunities for subordinate groups to participate in society,” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 384).

In my own study, I used these dimensions to critique my instructional practices and as a framework to examine the critical literacy practices of my students.

As I continued my research, I noticed that in order for true critical pedagogy to take place the teacher must be the facilitator and allow students to speak for themselves and take on the role of the teacher. For this reason, I entered my study with a focus on a dialogic approach where students are able to guide the discussions surrounding a text and build on one another's ideas organically. Here, students can ask and answer their own questions with teacher support and respond to the text naturally and authentically. This approach was reinforced by another study which asserted that "students must learn to debate important issues in books and question one another's interpretations to extend conversations about social issues," (Labadie, Mosley Wetzel & Rogers, 2012, p. 125). These discussions related to race, class, power, gender, and social justice "help students to consider multiple viewpoints and challenge commonly held assumptions," (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 385).

The school district I teach in is not incredibly diverse. For this reason, I felt that I had a responsibility to ensure that critical literacy picture books were used to not only examine a text for biases, missing voices, and other social issues, but also to help students become more empathetic, tolerant citizens as a result of their exposure to these authentic portrayals of different cultures and lifestyles. Working toward social justice needs to begin with creating an awareness that societal issues are critical for all populations to face, and in particular, those from the dominant culture. I am hoping that this awareness will increase as a result of critical literacy read alouds. Ultimately, I want my students to become critically competent and caring citizens by exploring social justice issues through

critical literacy. My hope is that through my thesis research, I am able to better understand how to best navigate some of the tough discussions that come with reading picture books that address race, privilege, and societal power structures, as well as understand the effects of using picture books from a critical literacy standpoint.

The research I read and the themes that emerged inspired me to look into the way that students respond to critical literacy texts and how their responses evolve as they are exposed to more and more literature that addresses social justice issues. Using literacy in this way has the power to validate students' responses to and interpretations of a text and as a result, defend democracy (Rosenblatt, 1994). From my research, I have also learned that interpreting texts through a critical lens can help students become aware of the messages that texts communicate about power, race, and gender, who should receive privileges, and who has been or continues to be oppressed. As students learn how to engage in critical literacy, they also "become more aware of their views and how their views influence their interpretations of texts and interactions with people," (Hall & Piazza, 2008, p. 32).

I wondered how, when read critically, certain texts would affect how students respond to social inequalities as well as their ability to be more aware of the implicit biases embedded in our society and how this awareness develops their tolerance and acceptance of others. While the body of research on critical literacy has grown over the past decade and has informed the field of education, additional inquiry on the pairing of critical literacy read alouds and student oral and written responses to text has yet to be studied in more detail, which is what this study was designed to do.

## **Statement of the Research Problem and Question**

The purpose of this study was to examine any effects that critical literacy read alouds had on students' ability to demonstrate critical perspectives toward the text. Specifically, I will investigate how these read alouds can be used to help students examine a text for biases, perspectives, and missing voices, as well as increase their cultural-competency, tolerance and respect for differences. What effect does students' participation in critical discussions have on their awareness of the messages that texts communicate about power, race, and gender, who should receive privileges, and who has been or continues to be oppressed? How do critical literacy texts help students engage in discussions about social issues? How do students explore historical social justice issues through critical discussions following the reading of critical literacy texts?

**Story of the question.** I began this school year with a conscious effort to help develop my students' culturally competence and social awareness. This decision came about as a result of what I learned during my graduate course: Multicultural Literacy as well as my school district's academic equity initiatives. Following the completion of the Multicultural Literacy course, I began to expand my collection of authentic, multicultural texts and add them to my classroom library, with the goal of providing all of my students both a window into other cultures as well as a reflection of their own culture and family values through these texts. To do this, I began reading picture books such as *The Other Side* and *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts and *The Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Pena as a part of my character education lessons. I hoped that these texts would help my students become more empathetic,



accepting and inclusive people from their exposure to these authentic portrayals of various ways of life.

Additionally, over the past two years my district has been working toward creating a more inclusive and equitable academic environment by working with Rowan University's Center for Access, Success & Equity (CASE). Various professors within this department have held professional development sessions at my district in order to help our staff explore topics such as systematic oppression and implicit bias. The district's work with CASE then led to the creation of a culturally responsive curriculum committee. As a member of this committee, I soon learned that implicit biases are maintained through lack of contact with others beyond your ingroup. This made me truly reflect on my students, our classroom makeup and my classroom instruction. Were my students being exposed to those outside of their ingroup? Was I creating a space that included a diverse variety of texts and instructional strategies that allowed students to tap into their funds of knowledge? I attempted to include these elements of culturally responsive pedagogy in my instruction through classroom read alouds that addressed issues of power, privilege and inequalities.

However, I found myself struggling to determine the best way to navigate some of the tough discussions that come with reading picture books that address race, privilege, and societal power structures, especially with my 8-year-old students. My hope is that through my thesis research, I am able to better understand how to best navigate these discussions, including what types of questions and follow-up questions to ask. I also hope to discover the effects of using picture books from a critical literacy standpoint. After

carefully planned read alouds and both whole group and partner discussions, how has students' ability to adopt a critical perspective toward a text improved?

The following chapters outline the teacher research journey where I explored my question. Chapter Two will share the current research that I used to frame my study. The research was based on critical literacy theory and its pedagogical implications, reader's response theory and instructional practices, and the pedagogical implications of classroom read alouds. Chapter Three provides context for the study site and participants and also outlines the research design and methodology used. Chapter Four will examine the data collected during the study and explain my analysis. Chapter Five will offer my conclusions, the study's limitations, and its implications for the educational field.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

“The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.”

(Freire, 1970, p. 73)

The students filling the seats of today’s classrooms are not only consumers of information, but also content producers and distributors. They have access to a wealth of information at their fingertips, and within a matter of seconds, they are able to write, read, speak, listen, view and visually represent this information in a variety of digital platforms. Because students have access to such a large amount of information as well as the ability to quickly and easily generate content, it is especially crucial that students are able to take a critical stance toward a text or new literacy. This is of utmost importance in our current digital age, where students must be able to navigate and recognize fake news, misinformation, as well as any inaccuracies, biases and stereotypes that may be present in what they read, see, and hear. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature pertaining to Critical Literacy and Reader’s Response theory, and the social implications of using practices that stem from the sociocultural theory of learning in the classroom. The first two sections discuss the critical literacy theory and its pedagogical implications. The third and fourth sections discuss the theory and implications of reader’s response theory, including the effects of a dialogic approach to instruction in an elementary classroom, which is where this study takes place. The fifth section identifies the rationale for using

read alouds to engage students in the reading process and provide them a space to meaningfully respond to texts.

### **Critical Literacy Theory**

In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, exiled Brazilian educator Paulo Freire asserts that there is no such thing as neutral education. Instead, he states that education either “functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom,” (Freire, 1970, p. 34). His theory falls under the umbrella of the social learning theory of reading which views learning as social in nature and emphasizes the importance of social influences and social interaction on learning. In his work, Freire sought to develop a pedagogy that denounces structures of oppression through the development of conscientização, or students’ critical consciousness and ability to “perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality,” (Freire, 1970, p. 17). In order to achieve conscientização and disrupt the status quo, Freire presents a “problem-posing” model of education as an alternative to the “banking” concept of education. According to the banking model, students are containers or receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The teacher “deposits” information that the students receive, memorize, repeat, and store. In this way, “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing,” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Freire believed that the more students work at storing this information that is imposed upon them, the less likely they are to become critically conscious. The banking concept encourages passivity in the oppressed and fills their consciousness “with slogans which create even more fear of freedom,” (Freire, 1970, p. 93).

In contrast, the problem-posing educational model responds to critical consciousness. Here, the teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but is “taught in dialogue with the students who in turn, while being taught, also teach” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). This model resolves the contradiction between teacher and student so that the teacher becomes the “teacher-student” and the students, the “students-teachers.” The teacher-student poses problems of human beings and their relations with the world to the students-teachers. The teacher then reconsiders their prior considerations as students express their own. This instructional practice “stimulates true reflection and action upon reality,” which Freire refers to as praxis (Freire, 1970, p. 79). The problem-posing model promotes the dialogue between teachers and students as the process of learning and knowing, and the place where “freedom begins,” (Freire, 1970, p. 93). This dialogical encounter helps students look critically at the world and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. Ultimately, Freire’s work developed into a theory known as Critical Literacy Theory, which considers the ways education either reinforces inequalities in society or empowers individuals to overcome social oppression. Instructional practices that emanate from this theory include encouraging the liberation of the oppressed through inquiry, problematizing generally accepted beliefs or ideology, and thoroughly examining multiple perspectives.

Henry Giroux and Ira Shor contributed to Freire’s work in the area of critical literacy by discussing the importance of critical literacy pedagogy as well as the effects of critical literacy on our democracy. According to Shor, critical literacy promotes social justice by challenging the status quo and “questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane,” (Shor, 1999, p. 2). He believed

that this form of literacy must be understood as becoming conscious of one's experience as constructed within specific power relations. Shor also cited the democratic implications of critical literacy stating that in the critical process, students become "redeveloped as democratic agents and social critics," (Shor, 1999, p. 3). Shor adds that educators must use teaching methods that "help develop students as critically thinking citizens who use language to question knowledge, experience and power in society," (Shor, 1999, p. 9) and curriculum must be based simultaneously in "action and reflection in order to create a reflective democratic citizen," (Shor, 1999, p. 10).

Another component of critical literacy that contributes to the creation of reflective, democratic citizens, is the dialogic practice that occurs when a mutual learning process is present between the teacher and the students. This dialogic discourse helps students to critique and engage in society (including its inequalities and injustices), propose alternatives, and take action on those alternatives. In this way, the goal of education is to "advance students' ability to understand, articulate, and act democratically in their social experiences," (Shor, 1999, p. 19). However, Shor adds that this goal may be difficult to achieve because we are already deeply socialized by the banking model of education, stating that we "must first reconcile the student-teacher dichotomy," (Shor, 1999, p. 13).

In his article, "Beyond the ethics of flag waving: schooling and citizenship for a critical democracy" Giroux provides key principles that help to define critical literacy pedagogy. He writes that the pedagogy must challenge ideologies and social practices that further inequalities and should be "rooted in social discourses arising out of concrete historical and public struggles that extend the range of political practices that promote a

just and compassionate social order,” (Giroux, 1991, p. 306). Classroom practices should also connect to the struggles found within the immediate community. Giroux goes on to say that curriculum should enable students to “make judgements about how society is historically and socially constructed and about how existing social relations are implicated in relations of equality and justice,” (Giroux, 1991, p. 307). Another important piece to critical literacy pedagogy is the ability for students to create social action and engage in projects that allow them to better understand the experiences of those who are excluded from the benefits of American society because of their race, class, gender, or age. From this work, students will deepen their understanding “of their role as agents of public formation,” (Giroux, 1991, p. 308). In 1999, Shor also wrote that students must be able to question and respond to received knowledge in order to challenge inequality and become active citizens. This sentiment continues to be strongly applicable in light of today’s current political and social climate as evidenced in a variety of research conducted within the last decade.

### **Critical Literacy Instructional Practices**

For true critical literacy pedagogy to take place, teachers must address the hierarchical relationship that often exists between teachers and students. This is what two teams of teacher-researchers set out to accomplish in their recent studies.

**4 dimensions.** Lewison, Flint & Sluys began their study in an attempt to answer the question: “what does critical literacy look like in the classroom of teachers who are just beginning to implement critical practices?” In their research, the authors analyzed the instructional practices of both a critical literacy newcomer and a novice. These elementary teachers were also participating in workshops and group sessions related to

critical literacy. Through classroom observations, interviews and questionnaires, the authors were able to “understand more deeply how a critical literacy curriculum is enacted in classrooms and the challenges that arise,” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 382). When analyzing their results, they categorized the data in terms of four dimensions of critical literacy, which were developed as a result of reviewing and synthesizing a range of definitions that have appeared in research and professional literature. These dimensions provided a lens to critique teacher practice and a framework for examining critical literacy practices. The dimensions include: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focusing on sociopolitical issues; and taking action and promoting social justice. When used interrelatedly, the four dimensions can be used to “redefine literacy as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that increase opportunities for subordinate groups to participate in society,” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 384). To achieve this goal, Lewison, Flint & Sluys encouraged teachers to use critical texts that “make difference visible, give voice to those traditionally silenced, explore dominant systems of meaning in our society, question why certain groups are positioned as others and show how people can take action on important social issues,” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 384). The reading of these critical texts were followed by critical conversations in which students reflected and discussed social injustices and strategies to improve situations. The results of this study found that newcomers to critical literacy were able to initiate these critical conversations around books and help students interrogate everyday beliefs whereas novice educators helped children to better understand the ways in which the larger sociopolitical structures position people in the world. However, both types of educators felt that they needed to expand their own



understanding of sociopolitical systems and power relationships in both historical and current events.

In their work, Labadie, Mosley & Rogers sought to discover how young students and their teachers create spaces for critical literacy in the context of book introductions. Their work was guided by Lewison, Flint & Sluys' four dimensions of critical literacy and they used this framework when analyzing their data which included videotaped guided reading lessons. The authors found that "spaces for critical literacy were opened through careful selection of books, use of purposeful prompts and the teacher's willingness to let silence reign during the book introduction," (Labadie, Mosley & Rogers, 2012, p. 119). From these findings, Labadie, Mosley & Rogers were able to develop specific language that can be used by teachers to help students interpret texts critically when reading independently and in other contexts. This language includes the language of possibility such as "is there a different way to think about this?"; the language of evidence which includes questions like "how do you know?"; and the language of noticing and naming to extend meaning such as "what do you notice?" Here, the teachers used language purposefully to support students' understanding of critical social issues. The authors also found that silence was an important piece to critical literacy instructional practices. Silence, wait time, open-ended questions and careful listening supported students as they shared their ideas, generated, and tested possible theories regarding social issues.

**Social implications of critical literacy.** Critical literacy pedagogy plays an important role in developing students' ability to promote social justice as well as their cultural awareness (Souto-Manning, 2009). When students are provided the opportunity

to “interrogate multiple viewpoints and read multiple versions of the same text from various perspectives, differences are analyzed and constructed within pedagogical contexts that promote compassion and tolerance rather than envy, hatred and bigotry,” (Giroux, 1991, p. 307). Mariana Souto-Manning looked closely at this area of her own instruction during a two-year study that took place in her widely diverse first grade classroom. In her study, Souto-Manning sought to discover how multicultural children’s literature could be used as a vehicle for culturally responsive pedagogy. Souto-Manning’s classroom instruction focused on areas of critical literacy including interrogating multiple viewpoints, making differences visible, examining competing narratives and writing counternarratives to dominant discourses. After reading each multicultural children’s book, students engaged in dialogue while uncovering social issues within the texts. In using these critical literacy practices, students are often able to “make sense of important social issues and historical events, even when separated from a text by historical or experiential distance,” (Labadie, Mosley & Rogers, 2012, p. 119). From these instructional practices, students were able to problematize the racially and socioeconomically segregated nature of the pull-out educational programs in their schools. In this way, Souto-Manning was able to facilitate the development of her students as active agents of knowledge. Through careful classroom observations and from analyzing student and teacher talk, Souto-Manning found that critical literacy pedagogy and authentic multicultural literature helped to build a classroom community that “not only tolerated, but also embraced diversity as a resource,” (Souto-Manning, 2009, p. 58). Her students were able to transform and recreate relationships with one another, recognize each other’s differences as strengths, and problematize everyday issues as well

as their own assumptions. This, she states, created a collaborative learning community that honors and includes diverse voices.

### **Reader's Response Theory**

In a similar way that Freire was concerned for the democratic involvement of students, so was Louise Rosenblatt. In her first seminal text, *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt presents her theory of reading as a transaction between the reader and the text. The reciprocal nature of the reading experience explains that reading is neither in the text, nor in the reader. Rather, the reader must transact with the text to make meaning and in this transaction, readers need to think responsibly and responsively in order to preserve democracy.

**In defense of democracy.** Rosenblatt's theory invites teachers and students to become more actively engaged in the texts they are reading. Her belief stems from John Dewey, who emphasized the development of students' cognitive abilities as well as the importance of producing "involved citizens capable of successfully participating in and contributing to a democratic society." (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 49). Strongly influenced by Dewey's beliefs, Rosenblatt adopted his term *transaction* for the name of her theory. In her theory, this dynamic transaction requires the reader to be active and draw upon his or her past experiences to interact with a text. Rosenblatt argues that because every reader's schema is unique, then every reading experience is unique to each individual. Rosenblatt also describes the phrase "transaction" as placing "stress on each reading as a particular event involving a particular reader and a particular text recursively influencing each other under particular circumstances," (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 292). Rosenblatt also believed that during the transaction with the text, the reader uses his or

her memories, thoughts, and feelings to develop a new experience, known as the poem, and “this becomes part of the ongoing stream of his or her life experiences,” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12). Rosenblatt expanded on this theory stating that there is no meaning already within a text or the symbols on a page “until an idea in somebody's mind links the sign with what it points to. We can't just concentrate on the words and their meaning apart from particular linguistic events. This firmly grounds literature in its human context,” (Karolides, 1999, p. 162).

Rosenblatt asserts that the reader assumes a stance, or “habit of mind” when reading. A reader’s habit of mind when reading falls along a continuum between efferent and aesthetic reading. Efferent reading, derived from the Latin, to carry away, happens when the reader’s attention is focused on what will remain after the reading, such as new information gained, a solution to a problem, or actions to be carried out. During aesthetic reading, the main concern is what happens during the actual reading event including the feelings, the attitudes, and associations that the words evoke. The reader’s stance “guides the choice of what to pay attention to, what to select and synthesize, from the elements stirred up in the stream of consciousness during the transaction with the text” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 184). Rosenblatt theorized that the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader’s past experiences with both literature and life. The text serves as a “guide for the selecting, rejecting and ordering of what is being called forth” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 11).

According to Jeanne Connell (2001), classroom teachers should promote aesthetic experiences by linking student interests, emotions, and imagination with their reading. She goes on to say that in order to achieve a full, sound reading of a text, teachers must help students to not only develop habits of reflection that have an emotional and

imaginative quality but also, as Rosenblatt states, “build upon their initial aesthetic response with critical reflection through writing, class discussion, and further study,” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 75). Connell also adds to Rosenblatt’s theory of literacy as a defense of democracy. She writes that a literary work “serves to bring a reader beyond the personal response into a wide array of social practices and concerns,” (Connell, 2001, p. 48). In order to achieve this goal, students must be exposed to a variety of authentic, rich literature, so that students are able to “come to know the complex and dynamic nature of society,” (Connell, 2001, p. 50).

### **Reader’s Response Instructional Practices**

A wealth of research describes the implications of Rosenblatt’s Reader’s Response theory on classroom instruction. From making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections when reading, to Double Entry Journals that allow students to track their reactions, noticings and wonderings when reading, teachers are able to support students in taking an aesthetic or efferent stance when responding to texts in a variety of ways. At the heart of these practices is allowing students to share and discuss their responses to the text both orally or in writing. In this way, Reader’s Response theory reinforces the dialogic practices that Freire cites as crucial to implementing true critical and liberatory pedagogy.

**Using class discussions to respond to text.** According to Souto-Manning, classroom texts serve as a tool for critical dialogue and action. The classroom dialogue that surrounds a text is “as important as, if not more important than, reading the book itself. It is the role of the teacher to facilitate the dialogue and to pay special attention to the critical turns, supporting them, so as to promote and enable problem solving and

action among young children,” (Souto-Manning, 2009, p. 65). From the class discussions that took place during and after reading multicultural children’s literature, Souto-Manning found that students were able to see that thoughts that differed from theirs were equally as valid. These conversations also helped her students to understand the importance of hearing multiple voices and multiple perspectives of the same text. Students were able to share their experiences through sincere conversations in a classroom community where they feel safe and trusted. Students in this class also learned that “unless they have the information from many people, and had listened to many voices, they could not have a clear picture of the situation,” (Souto-Manning, 2009, p. 69).

Similarly, Lightner & Wilkinson found that students are able to construct an understanding from the text through collaboration with peers. In their research, these authors found that talk should be used as a tool for making meaning and for rigorous examination of the text. They write that talk not only “helps students organize their thoughts, make inferences, and reflect on their understandings of the text,” but also “fosters active engagement with meaningful text elements,” (Lightner & Wilkinson, 2017, p. 436). In addition, discussions about texts expose students to rich language experiences and provide them with opportunities to organize their thoughts, make inferences, and ask questions when their understanding of the text breaks down. Lightner & Wilkinson’s article analyzes nine discussion frameworks. Each framework aligns to specific instructional goals and different classroom contexts. The instructional goals include working to improve students’ ability to adopt an efferent, expressive or critical-analytic stance toward a text. According to Rosenblatt (1995), these stances refer to the

reader's selective orientation toward a text and reflects the purpose for reading. The frameworks presented in this article include the type of dialogue that will support the kind of thinking and the stances that teachers would like students to adopt. These frameworks describe who determines what is discussed as well as who sanctions what students say, which is known as interpretive authority. Based on their analysis, Lightner & Wilkinson report that frameworks that foreground an expressive stance, such as book clubs, literature circles and grand conversations often include student-led discussions that take place in small groups. In order for students to adopt an efferent stance, frameworks such as questioning the author and instructional conversations are typically teacher-led and take place with the whole class. Lastly, critical-analytic stances can be adopted by students when collaborative reasoning, paideia seminar or the philosophy for children frameworks are used. These frameworks are also teacher-led, but both the student and teacher control the topic. In all of the aforementioned frameworks, both the teacher and students ask and answer questions. The questions are authentic, are of high cognitive demand and encourage students to analyze the text rather than simply report what the text says. Additionally, "when students and the teacher respond to each other, they ask questions and make comments that build on prior student comments. These features are indicative of productive discussions about text," (Lightner & Wilkinson, 2017, p. 435). Ultimately, these classrooms discussions surrounding texts not only facilitate comprehension but also foster students' ability to look at a single text from multiple perspectives.

## **Classroom Read Alouds & Shared Reading**

Multiple theoretical perspectives stemming from the sociocultural theory of learning support the importance of reading aloud to students and engaging them in a shared reading of a text. According to Holdaway's (1979) theory of literacy development, natural storytelling situations foster children's literacy growth and strengthen their oral language, concepts of print and appreciation for books. Holdaway promoted the "shared reading technique" in which teachers select high-quality literature that entice children, hook them on language patterns and are visually engaging for all students. Shared reading has been shown to be effective in "promoting students' literacy development in the areas of word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency," (Reutzel, Hollingsworth, & Eldredge, 1994). Similarly, interactive read alouds can be used to model fluent reading and allow teachers and students to construct knowledge together (Wiseman, 2011).

In her study, Wiseman (2011) explored how teachers can support students' learning by implementing interactive read alouds. Through classroom observations, field notes and an analysis of the reading instruction that took place in a kindergarten classroom, Wiseman was able to determine the pedagogical implications of interactive read alouds. These implications include the development of student literacy skills as well as creating a community where students can learn together. This research also showed that, in a kindergarten classroom, the interactive read aloud created a space where meaning is "constructed through dialogue and classroom interaction, providing an important opportunity for children to respond to literature in a way that builds on their strengths and scaffolds knowledge," (Wiseman, 2011, p. 435). During the interactive read alouds, Wiseman observed the teacher using open ended questioning. This instructional



practice “emphasized that meaning existed in the minds of the readers and that the students had important perceptions for interpreting stories,” (Wiseman, 2011, p. 434). When asking students to respond to the read aloud, the teacher scaffolded student responses, used questioning to extend their thinking, and used confirming statements that showed support of all ideas and responses. In this way, the teacher acted as a facilitator by guiding student responses and allowing their authentic responses to become a catalyst for further discussion about the text. According to Wiseman, this student-centered approach to reading and learning “reflects the power of the interactive read alouds; to engage and motivate children’s involvement in the reading process,” (Wiseman, 2011, p. 437).

Another study looked specifically at the effects that read alouds have on students’ engagement and comprehension. In this research, Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker (2008) looked at the efficacy of read alouds when used with before, during and after reading strategies. They then analyzed the ideal format for conducting classroom read alouds which included addressing student enjoyment of reading as well as the instruction that took place during the read alouds. The reading strategies were used in the context of both teacher-directed and student-directed discussions. These strategies included making and justifying predictions about the text, paraphrasing new learning, making connections to the text and retelling. Essentially, the read alouds in this study incorporated structured, interactive teacher and student text-based discussions. In doing so, the authors created “opportunities for children to reflect on the storyline and promote comprehension through discussion,” (Santoro, et al., 2008, p. 397).

The results of this study indicated that “enhancing read alouds with comprehension strategies and text-based discussions make a positive difference in student performance,” (Santoro, et al., 2008, p. 398). Additionally, participating students were able to speak with more depth and metacognitive awareness about their comprehension. This research also demonstrated that “read aloud time is an ideal opportunity to build comprehension through the use of oral language activities, listening comprehension, and text-based discussion,” (Santoro, et al., 2008, p. 407). When read alouds are used with carefully planned, active and engaging discussions about the text, they can promote comprehension and expand students’ vocabulary. This active participation in purposeful discussions about the text on the part of the students is what makes read alouds meaningful (Santoro, et al., 2008).

Research has also been conducted on the effects of using interactive read alouds to address social-emotional learning. In one study, researchers analyzed the components of a successful read aloud including before, during, and after reading questions and activities that promote positive student behaviors. In their article, Britt, Wilkins, Davis & Bowlin (2016) state that there is limited research on how read alouds can be used to develop children's social skills. For this reason, two of the authors read books with social-emotional learning themes to young children and documented the conversations that took place during and after the read aloud as well as any behavioral changes of the students that may have occurred following the read aloud. They then collected a variety of high-quality children’s literature that they found effective in addressing certain areas of social emotional learning including empathy, fairness, analyzing conflict, and considering multiple perspectives. The article noted that while character education programs would

also address and promote social-emotional learning, these programs can be expensive and time consuming whereas interactive read alouds can address social-emotional learning while also improving literacy skills. Additionally, read alouds provide students the opportunity to relate to characters and issues in the story and as a result, “children can develop interpersonal skills that prepare them to effectively resolve conflicts in their own lives,” (Britt, et al., 2016, p. 44).

An important component to this research was the interactive part of the read aloud. The teacher “must include effective questioning techniques that stimulate high rates of student responses,” and as young children respond to stories and hear the views of classmates, “they negotiate new reactions and social decisions,” (Britt, et al., 2016, p. 45). It is also especially important that when exposing students to books that encourage perspective-taking, the teacher should implement critical literacy practices including having students consider questions regarding which view of the world is put forth by the ideas in this text and which view is not. These types of open-ended questions “prompt multiple interpretations to ensure that discussions go beyond simple retellings of the story,” (Britt, et al., 2016, p. 53). The authors also discussed that another way students can interact with the read aloud is through writing. Connecting writing activities to ideas presented in the read-aloud “provides opportunities for students to process the story and enhance the lesson being taught,” (Britt, et al., 2016, p. 53). As a whole, this interactive portion of the read aloud is crucial to increasing the likelihood that students will transfer the literacy strategy into their own reading or the addressed area of social emotional-learning into their own lives.

As a result of the research, this study found that “children can learn essential skills related to managing their emotions and treating others with respect through participating in interactive read alouds,” (Britt, et al., 2016, 49). By simultaneously addressing behavior and literacy through teacher and student interactive class read alouds, students were able to expand and strengthen their literacy development, expressive language, vocabulary, and background knowledge,” (Britt, et al., 2016). Using read alouds in this way creates a classroom environment where students are able to become more successful because of the positive social-emotional behaviors and interactions between students.

## **Conclusion**

After reviewing the literature regarding critical literacy, reader’s response, and classroom read alouds, it has been determined that there is a further need to add to this body of research, specifically in regard to the marriage of Critical Literacy Theory and Reader’s Response Theory. There is limited data on what instructional practices best support students in disrupting the status quo, examining multiple perspectives, and taking action for social justice. Conversations around a text can build community and engage in topics in critical and significant ways through classroom participation (Wiseman, 2001). However, there is a lack of research regarding how critical literacy read alouds can spark conversations that allow elementary students to examine past and current social relations and analyze these as opportunities for change toward more just relations. The hope of this study is to provide additional insight into the effects of providing elementary students the opportunity to respond to critical text read alouds.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Context**

#### **Community**

The study took place in a third grade classroom in the northeastern region of the United States. The district had two elementary schools, serving students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to fifth and a middle school serving grades six to eight. According to the 2010 United States Census, there were 6,042 people, 2,087 households, and 1,635 families residing in the study site's township. The racial demographics were listed as 81.5% White, 12.5% Black or African American, 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.5% Asian, 2.1% two or more races, and 4% Hispanic or Latino of any race. The median household income was \$87,200 with about 3.7% of residents below the poverty line, including 2.4% of people under the age of 18.

#### **School**

The actual study site was an elementary school in southern New Jersey that serves grades two through five with a total enrollment of 355 students, with 15% of students categorized as economically disadvantaged. On standardized testing, 74.7% of students Met or Exceeded Expectations on ELA Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing and 80.1% of students Met or Exceeded Expectations on Math PARCC testing in the 2017-2018 school year. The faculty to student ratio was 7:1 with a faculty attendance rate of 98% (NJ State School Performance Report Card, 2017/2018). The school's mission statement reflected its commitment to providing opportunities for students to engage in 21st century skills that would prepare them for college and career. Students had access to a 1:1 ratio of Chromebooks that

allowed them to collaborate and interact on the Google Classroom platform. In addition to 125 minutes of daily English Language Arts and 75 minutes of daily Mathematics instruction, the student schedule included Science, Social Studies, World Language, Art, Music, Physical Education, and STEM/Technology. Some additional educational opportunities supported the school's belief that all students are willing and capable of learning, such as a Gifted and Talented program, a Multi-Disabled classroom, and a Language and Learning Disabilities classroom.

### **Classroom**

The study site was my third grade classroom, and specifically, our character education lessons. The student population was made up of 19 general education students including ten boys and nine girls. There was one general education teacher (me) in the classroom. Each character education lesson followed the same routine in my classroom. These lessons took place once a week during a 50-minute block of time during which every student in the class participated in the whole, group, partner and independent activities. The physical space of the classroom consisted of 19 student desks grouped into five pods of three to four and a lowered table with cushions used as a flexible seating option. The space was equipped with a Chromebook charging station, SMARTboard, whiteboards, and bulletin boards. One whiteboard listed the day's agenda, accountable talk speaking stems, a reminders board, and the unit's learning goals. Another bulletin board displayed the classroom word wall. One of the classroom's walls contained bookshelves that housed the classroom library selections and other instructional materials. In the back of the classroom, there were two kidney-shaped tables used for small group instruction.

## **Teacher**

During the study, it was my fifth year into my teaching career, with all five years having taught at the study site. My undergraduate degree was in Elementary Education and Journalism from Rider University; I graduated from Rider in 2014. I began working in my current southern New Jersey district in 2014. My career as a graduate student in a Master's in Reading program began in the 2016-2017 school year where I hoped to gain more insight and instructional resources to help my third grade students succeed.

## **Students**

The students who participated in this study were selected from my third grade classroom. Consent forms were distributed along with information about the study to parents/guardians of each student in the class. Parents or guardians of fourteen students who wished to participate indicated this on their consent forms. The participant group discussed in this study consisted of seven girls and seven boys. Of the students in this group, 11 were Caucasian, one was African-American and two were Hispanic. To protect their privacy, all students have been given pseudonyms. The girls in this study were Nina, Marina, Gina, Carly, Rebecca, Susie, and Rachel. The boys were Jed, James, Tommy, Luke, Dan, Alex, and Brady.

## **Research Design & Methodology**

This study used the qualitative practitioner research paradigm as a framework. According to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009), teacher research can be defined as research used by practitioners to inform their own practice or to be an agent of change. In this research, a practicing or pre-service educator develops an inquiry question and looks closely at their own instruction in order to explore and possibly answer this question.

This qualitative analysis of classroom instruction includes reading literature on the topic to inform the inquiry, and gathering and interpreting school and classroom data to improve student and school achievement. Qualitative research typically uses data collection methods such as interviews, surveys, teacher observation and anecdotal notes. Ruth Shagoury and Brenda Miller Power (2012), add that “teacher research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data and analyzing it to answer those questions” (p. 2).

This study aimed to identify the effects of critical literacy read alouds on students’ ability to adopt critical perspectives and respond to the multiple perspectives within the text. Specifically, the study focused on four particular aspects of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focusing on sociopolitical issues; and correct previously held misconceptions. In order to facilitate these components of critical literacy, the study used a dialogic approach to instruction. Here, students listened to critical literacy read alouds that presented multiple perspectives and highlighted social justice issues and then responded to these texts authentically both orally and in writing. Throughout the course of the study, students focused on considering the viewpoints of less heard voices and challenging commonly held assumptions. Qualitative inquiry strategies used to conduct this study were transcriptions of student discussions, student written responses to reflection questions, anecdotal notes, and a teacher research journal.

### **Procedure of the Study**

This teacher research study used qualitative methods and data to analyze how third grade students respond to the multiple perspectives in read alouds of critical texts.



Using multicultural children's literature was something I had begun to implement into my character education lessons, but I was curious about how providing students the opportunity to critically discuss and respond to the text would support their ability to demonstrate critical perspectives and improve their awareness of social justice issues. Some qualitative data collected over the duration of this study consisted of audio recordings of student talk both in partner and whole group settings, and observational notes taken by myself during the class read alouds and discussions. Another important part of the procedure was to record my teacher research journey through the use of an inquiry journal. In this journal, questions and reflections throughout the process were recorded about once a week on average. This served as an additional data source in which I, as the co-investigator, would be able to notice themes and patterns occurring within my research and data.

This study's data collection began in November and extended through December of 2018. However, prior to the study's collection period, I began to build a safe and supportive classroom environment where students felt that their voice and opinion was valued. This was done through biweekly morning meetings where students learned to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts with one another. I also conducted mini lessons on how to effectively participate in a conversation using accountable talk speaking stems and active listening techniques. During the month of September, I modeled how to effectively "turn and talk" with a partner and the students practiced turning and talking using the speaking stems and active listening strategies. An anchor chart was also created as a reference to help guide students in productively sharing their thinking with others throughout the year. After I introduced the study and determined participants through

parental consent, the study commenced and took place over six instructional weeks in the 2018-2019 school year. Each lesson started with previewing the text using the title and cover to make predictions and activate student background knowledge. Next, students listened as the text was read aloud. I stopped at key points in the text to allow the students to respond to the events of the story. The students did so in the whole class setting as well as when turning to talk with one or two partners. Finally, after the completion of each read aloud, students responded to a reflection question which provided them a space to express their thoughts individually in writing. This response was typed on each student's Chromebook.

During weeks one and two of the study, I discussed with students the critical literacy practice of examining multiple perspectives about a social justice issues and relayed to students that the same event can be viewed in different ways by different participants and observers. In our first two read alouds students discussed the multiple "voices" in a text and discussed those that were supported in the text and those that were silenced. Students also discussed how in these texts, dominant systems position people as members or outsiders. In weeks three and four, students discussed messages communicated about power, race, and gender following the read alouds for those weeks. Lastly, during and after the read alouds in weeks five and six, students discussed how they would critique the text and question the status quo. After each week, all discussions were audio record, transcribed and analyzed, and the typed reflections were collected and analyzed as well. I also recorded anecdotal notes in my teacher journal weekly, including observations of how the students' participation and engagement changed as they interacted with books centered on critical social justice issues. I also noted students'

verbal and nonverbal actions during the read alouds as well as their social interactions throughout other parts of the school day.

### **Data Sources**

Multiple sources of data were used throughout the study to examine how third grade students respond to the multiple perspectives in read alouds of critical texts. To analyze the student talk that took place during and after the read alouds, audio recordings were necessary. I listened to and transcribed the student talk that occurred during and after each read aloud. These transcriptions included both whole group and partner discussions. I then analyzed the types of responses students had to the text in order to understand how their ability to demonstrate critical perspectives was changing and evolving. Another important data source for the study was the students' individual written responses to each read aloud. Here, the students typed their answer to an open-ended reflection question. The students were provided between 10-25 minutes to respond to this question. These individual responses were especially useful in understanding each students' personal thoughts about the social issues presented in the text. Lastly, I used observations and a teacher research journal to record student actions and my own teacher researcher reflections. Anecdotal notes were written during the students' discussions to report what happened that could not be examined through audio recordings. This journal also noted the social interactions of the students throughout other parts of the school day to determine if the read alouds were affecting their overall social/emotional abilities. The teacher research journal traced my questions, concerns, and thoughts throughout the research process.

Table 1.

*Critical Literacy Texts*

Critical Literacy Texts	
Week 1	<i>The Other Side</i> by Jacqueline Woodson
Week 2	<i>Those Shoes</i> by Maribeth Boelts
Week 3	<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i> by Malala Yousafzai
Week 4	<i>White Socks Only</i> by Evelyn Coleman
Week 5	<i>My Name is Bilal</i> by Asma Mobin-Uddin
Week 6	<i>One Green Apple</i> by Eve Bunting

**Data Analysis**

Data collected over the duration of the study was used to identify themes and patterns and draw conclusions about critical literacy read alouds, classroom discussions and student responses. The data that I gathered included students' verbal responses to the text. Students were asked to respond to questions asked throughout the read aloud in both a whole group and partner setting. I used audio recordings to collect the details of these whole group and partner discussions. Students also responded to the text individually in writing. I then compared these responses to the four dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) to discern emerging and recurring themes and patterns related to critical literacy and the students' ability to demonstrate critical

perspectives and recognize multiple perspectives within the text. Together, the student oral responses, student written responses and the observation notes record in my teacher research journal were a triangulated data source to confirm any patterns that existed.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter four discusses the results of this research study which investigated the question, “how do third grade students respond to the multiple perspectives in read alouds of critical texts?” Conducted over a period of six weeks, the study used transcriptions of student discussions, written student reflections, teacher-research journal notes, and observations to determine major themes that emerged when students listened to read alouds that that deliberately foregrounded multiple perspectives. Students responded to each text orally before and during the read aloud, and responded in writing after each read aloud. The teacher research journal contained observations and notes regarding the students’ discussions and behaviors. As these data sources were analyzed and sorted, four key categories emerged that unified the student discussions and written reflections. Three of the categories were derived from Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys’ four dimensions of critical literacy (2002). These dimensions, including disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues, were developed as a result of a review and synthesis of a “range of definitions that appeared in the research and professional literature over the last 30 years,” (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, p. 382, 2002). After analyzing the data collected in this study, the patterns or themes that emerged show that when students respond to read alouds of critical texts they (1) disrupt the commonplace, (2) interrogate multiple viewpoints, (3) focus on sociopolitical issues, and (4) and correct misconceptions and develop critical stances toward social justice issues.

## Disrupting the Commonplace

Each of the six picture books that were read aloud during this study fostered critical conversations about silenced voices, dominant systems of meaning, and social justice issues. Through broad, open-ended questions asked before, during, and after each read aloud, the students were provided the space to control the discussions, become actively engaged in the texts and challenge commonly held beliefs. When analyzing the students' responses to the texts, there was evidence of students disrupting the status quo and attempting to see the everyday through new lenses. The chart below indicates the number of times students disrupted the commonplace when responding orally and in writing to these six read alouds.

Table 2.

*Number of Student Responses that Disrupt the Commonplace*

Disrupting the Commonplace	
Text	Number of Student Responses
<i>The Other Side</i>	2
<i>Those Shoes</i>	1
<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	1
<i>White Socks Only</i>	2
<i>My Name is Bilal</i>	1
<i>One Green Apple</i>	1
Total Responses: 8	

In the story *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007), a boy named Jeremy is unable to afford new shoes and as a result, wears old shoes given to him by the school guidance counselor. Because these shoes are old and outdated, Jeremy is teased by his peers but one student, Antonio, shows him kindness. In response to this, Gina said, “Antonio feels bad because Jeremy shouldn’t get laughed at just because he has different shoes.” Here, Gina is disrupting the commonplace by questioning the dominant, or common way of seeing the world, which in this case, is that shoes must be new and in style. In this comment, Gina is also shedding light on how certain people are positioned in society, specifically those of a lower socioeconomic status. In another instance, when reading *White Socks Only* (Coleman, 1996), James responded to the white man beating a young black girl for drinking out of a “Whites Only” water fountain. James raised his hand to share with the whole class stating,

“The man is mad because she’s black. He’s still caught up that if you’re not white skin you’re bad. He doesn’t like that she’s a young black kid and he thinks she’s bad without knowing her.”

Jed then built upon James’ comment saying, “he’s mad because she’s different. She’s brown and he’s white.” These responses show that the students are analyzing how certain people are positioned within society based on the color of their skin. James and Jed are also problematizing the fact that the white man in this story assumes that the black girl is “bad” because of the color of her skin. Though they did not verbalize it, the boys are touching on the white man’s implicit bias and the damage that such biases can cause. In this instance, teaching and talking about race and ethnicity with children, sometimes referred to as racial/ethnic socialization (RES), is supporting the students’ ability to recognize and combat prejudice and discrimination and prevent implicit biases of their



own (Loyd & Gather, 2018). This is especially important because enrollment of students of color and students who identify with two or more races within the United States K-12 education system is projected to increase substantially (Hussar & Bailey, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). This demographic change will impact how students, specifically White students, situate themselves in social settings. However, talking about race, ethnicity, and authentically valuing diversity, as James and Jed did, can help “stimulate more balanced discussions about the changes our society is currently facing while also promoting perspectives of inclusion,” (Loyd & Gaither, 2018, p. 55). Ultimately, through their response to this read aloud, it seems that the boys were able to “make sense of important social issues and historical events, even when separated from a text by historical or experiential distance,” (Labadie, Mosley & Rogers, 2012, p. 119).

Similarly, after reading *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), students were able to recognize that there is an unequal power dynamic between the white and black people in the text. A few students were able to realize, through the class discussion, that the long, large fence in the text not only divided the property of a white and black family, but also symbolized how minoritized people are positioned as outsiders. Specifically, Carly said, “the black family should not have to stay behind the fence and the girls should not be afraid to go over the fence and play together. You should care about each other and love one another no matter their skin color.” Tommy also responded to this text by saying, “I think it was good that Annie and Clover went across the fence and became friends. It taught them to not judge people or treat them differently because of their skin color.” These students were able to recognize how different groups are positioned and challenge the injustices present in the text.

In *My Name is Bilal* (Mobin-Uddin, 2005), the main character's sister is bullied for wearing a headscarf. She is told to go "back to her country" and the headscarf is ripped off her head. In response to this, Gina wrote, "It's kind of sad because they're bullying her just because they've never seen a Muslim person, but you can go up to them and get to know them and not bully them." This statement is evident of disrupting the status quo because Gina is critiquing the bully's xenophobia and raising the point that in order to be more accepting and inclusive, it's important to learn about one another's differences.

### **Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues**

When analyzing the students' written and oral responses to the critical texts that were read aloud in this study, students were able to focus on and discuss sociopolitical issues. The chart below shows how frequently students responded to the texts in this way.

Table 3.

*Number of Student Responses that Focus on Sociopolitical Issues*

<b>Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues</b>	
Text	Number of Student Responses
<i>The Other Side</i>	1
<i>Those Shoes</i>	1
<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	1
<i>White Socks Only</i>	2
<i>My Name is Bilal</i>	4
<i>One Green Apple</i>	4
Total Responses: 13	

While reading, *The Other Side*, James appeared to be upset that the white and black girl were unable to play together. When sharing with his neighbor he said,

“It doesn’t matter about your skin color, it doesn’t matter that you’re different, you should still be able to do whatever with other people that are black or white or even if they’re brownish or tannish.”

In this comment, James is going beyond a personal response to the text, and attempting to understand the sociopolitical systems in which we belong while critiquing the social injustices present in the text. Similarly, when reading *Malala's Magic Pencil* (Yousafzai, 2017), the entire class was shocked to learn that girls were unable to attend school, but boys could. Rebecca challenged this example of injustice and an unequal power relationship in her written reflection. She wrote,

“I think that Malala disobeyed the powerful and dangerous men and continued to go to school because she really liked school. It was a good choice to do that because everyone including Malala has a right to go to school.”

A few students also commented on the sociopolitical issues and inequalities present in *My Name is Bilal*. In this story, the boy who makes fun of a girl wearing a headscarf is wearing a baseball cap. When sharing her thoughts with the entire class, Marina said, “This boy is saying you can wear a hat on your head in America, but not a scarf on your head? In America, you can wear what you want on your head!” Following this statement, other students in the class nodded their heads in agreement. At another stopping point in this story, Nina turned to talk to her neighbor about the events that had occurred. She said,

“It’s just upsetting because just because someone has a different religion it does not give someone else the right to bully or pick on them. I think it was a bad for Scott to pick on Bilal and his sister.”

Her neighbor, Tommy, responded to this saying,

“Yeah, they were treated unfairly. Scott doesn’t know anything about them. They live in America, not another country. Just because she has a different religion doesn’t mean you have to bully them.”

At this point, while listening in to their conversation, I probed their thinking and asked, “What if Bilal and his sister were not born in the United States? What if they were from another country?” To this question, Tommy responded, “Scott still shouldn’t have been mean.” In this conversation, Nina and Tommy are discussing the issue of religious discrimination and they are beginning to problematize the incorrect assumption that Scott makes about Bilal and his sister’s home country. In a separate partner discussion, Marina discussed and attempted to understand the sociopolitical system behind Scott’s bullying. When asked why Bilal and his sister were being bullied, Marina said, “[Bilal and his

sister] are not liked because of their culture and maybe people think they are terrorists. Americans might think that.”

Kathryn: “Why might some Americans think that?”

For a moment, Marina and her neighbor, Jed, were silent and unsure of their answer. Then, Jed answered “because of the people that took over that plane on 9/11.”

Kathryn: “That was a sad moment in our history and a horrible event, but if one person of a certain race or ethnicity does something very bad, does that mean every person in that ethnic or racial group is bad?”

Everyone: “No.”

Following this conversation, I reflected on the fact that while our school acknowledges and mourns the events that occurred on September 11, 2001, the sentiment that this act of terror is not reflective of all people of Middle Eastern descent must be conveyed so that conclusions like the one Marina discussed are not drawn by our students.

After listening to *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006), the students were able to analyze the opportunities that people from different groups have to participate in society. In this story, Farah, who has recently moved to the United States and does not speak English, feels somewhat scared and nervous about going to school in her new home because she is looked at coldly and her father tells her, “we are not always liked here. Our home country and our new one have difficulties,” (Bunting, 2006). In response to this, the students thought about why others may not like Farah or think she is “bad.” In his written reflection, Joey said, “having a different language doesn’t mean she’s bad. I don’t think that’s good that people think that.” Tim also wrote, “I think it’s bad that they don’t like people that are different from them and that some people think people from

different countries are bad.” During the whole group conversation that took place while reading this text aloud, the current political climate present in the United States was discussed. When sharing his thoughts on why Farah might feel nervous or uncomfortable in her new home, James stated,

“Sometimes people from countries aren't really nice to people from other countries, kind of like Donald Trump. He doesn't like people from other countries, and that's not okay.”

Carly then chimed in saying,

“People shouldn't think she is bad. There are laws that say you can have whatever religion, you can have whatever culture or whatever beliefs and still live freely in this country. You can be yourself until Donald Trump says you can't anymore.”

The other students in the class did not respond to these statements and some seemed confused. I did not want to engage in a political discussion in a public school setting, and so I restated their thoughts and said, “so you're saying it's not right to assume someone from another country is bad, and that we should not judge people or treat them unkindly because of their culture and beliefs?” The students responded “yes” and other students in the class nodded in agreement. In this moment, James and Carly attempted to understand the sociopolitical systems in which we belong and challenged the injustices and discriminatory behaviors that they noticed and heard about either in the media or from their friends/family members. Despite their age, some of the students in this class were aware of the national debate regarding immigration. This read aloud was able to illicit the thoughts that students had on this topic and gave them the space to process a more complex subject topic within the context of an understandable children's book.

## Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

In this category, students were able to consider varying perspectives concurrently and reflect on voices that have traditionally been silenced or marginalized. The table below highlights the number of times that students interrogated multiple viewpoints when responding to the texts both orally and in writing.

Table 4.

*Number of Student Responses that Interrogate Multiple Viewpoints*

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	
Text	Number of Student Responses
<i>The Other Side</i>	1
<i>Those Shoes</i>	3
<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	1
<i>White Socks Only</i>	2
<i>My Name is Bilal</i>	2
<i>One Green Apple</i>	7
Total Responses: 16	

When reading *Those Shoes*, a few students thought about how Jeremy must feel when he decides to wear shoes that are much too small instead of the shoes given to him by the guidance counselor. In her reflection, Susie wrote, “he feels like he has to buy shoes that are the cool brand even though they are too small so he doesn’t get made fun of all the time.” Similarly, when discussing with a partner, Jen said, “he has to tape his

shoes up because he might not have enough money to buy another pair of shoes. He probably feels really sad about that.” These statements are evidence of Jen and Susie’s ability to empathize and understand this text from the perspective of a boy with a low socioeconomic status. In the whole group discussion that took place when reading *White Socks Only*, Gina considered the perspective of the woman who drank from the water fountain after the little girl and encouraged other people of color to do the same. She said, “the older woman wanted to encourage more people to drink there because they should have the right to drink there and the white man can’t tell them what to do.” Here, Gina is reflecting on a voice that has been historically missing or silenced.

During the read aloud of *My Name is Bilal*, Joey was able to examine the conflicting viewpoints of the bully, Scott, and Bilal and his sister. He raised his hand to share with the whole class and said,

“I think the other kids, like Scott, are thinking, ‘why does she have that scarf on and why is she wearing things that other people don’t have?’ Then, they’re making fun of her differences. I think that’s not good and Bilal and his sister must be feeling sad and scared.”

Later in the read aloud, I asked the students why Bilal might have wanted to change his name to “Bill.” Luke responded and said, “he’s afraid to have his name made fun of because he thinks the other kids are going to make fun of it.” This statement represents Luke’s ability to consider Bilal’s perspective and his experiences as a Muslim boy. When discussing Farah’s perspective in *One Green Apple*, many students were able to consider her views as a non-English speaking immigrant living in America. This was evident in the students’ responses. In her post-reading reflection, Rachel wrote,

“I thought she was nervous because she was the only person from another country in her whole class. That must have been scary, but eventually she made friends



and said her first word in English. I liked the story because it teaches us about this girl and helps us not be mean to people even though they are different.”

Rebecca also wrote about Farah’s perspective in her reflection stating, “I think that Farah was scared and nervous because she didn’t know anyone yet. Also, she didn’t know how to speak English and no one seemed to care. I felt bad for her.” In these responses, the students are making Farah’s differences visible while also reflecting on Farah’s perspective and her position as a marginalized person in American society.

In addition to interrogating multiple viewpoints within a text, a few students were able to take that interrogation a step further and use their understanding of contrasting views to take action and promote social justice. After hearing about the white man’s actions in *White Socks Only*, James was angry and raised his hand to say,

“Wait, he doesn’t own the fountain! Even if he did own the fountain, it’s not okay for him to put the sign up. If I owned the fountain, I’d take off the sign and I’d say “Everyone Only.”

Here, James provided an example of an action that might be taken to promote inclusion and social justice. Similarly, when reading *One Green Apple* Marina responded to the text by saying, “it’s wrong that Farah feels scared, it’s a free country. Every religion can come here!” In this comment, Marina did not provide an example of a specific action she would take, but her words convey the promotion of social justice and acceptance.

### **Misconceptions and Changing Views**

An interesting theme that emerged during this study was the misconceptions that students held regarding race, gender, religion and ethnicity, as well as their views toward social justice issues that changed as the study progressed. The number of misconceptions that arose as students responded to each text are shown in the chart below.

Table 5.

*Number of Student Responses that Indicate Misconceptions about Race, Gender, Religion and Ethnicity*

Misconceptions	
Text	Number of Student Responses
<i>The Other Side</i>	1
<i>Those Shoes</i>	2
<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	2
<i>White Socks Only</i>	2
<i>My Name is Bilal</i>	1
<i>One Green Apple</i>	2
Total Responses: 10	

The first misconception was the assumption that sociopolitical issues involving gender, race or religion are from long ago. For example, when reading *The Other Side*, Joey raised his hand to explain why the two girls were unable to play together. He said,

“Back in the old days, black people got treated less than white people and back in the old days, white people and black people didn’t like each other. Sometimes they were friends and they wanted to go to the same school, but they couldn’t. People were not treated equally back then, so they couldn’t play together because their parents wouldn’t let them.”

Students were also surprised to learn that *Malala's Magic Pencil* is a true story based on an event that occurred in 2012. They were even more shocked to learn that such injustices in education are still present in parts of the world today. Another misconception that a

few students held is that those of Middle Eastern or Asian descent must be immigrants if they are living in the United States. In *My Name is Bilal*, the author states that Bilal and his sister were born in the United States, but had moved to a new town. However, after listening to this text read aloud, Brady said, “they were treated badly by Scott because they are from another country.”

Some students also had misunderstandings regarding certain sociopolitical issues and in some cases, were unable to connect to or empathize with the characters experiencing the negative effects of these issues. This emerged in the students’ responses to *White Socks Only* (Coleman, 1996).

Alex: “Maybe he should have said it was a Whites Only water fountain nicely.”

Kathryn: “So if the white man asked nicely and said to the little girl, ‘can you please not use this fountain, it’s for Whites Only?’ would that be better?”

At this point, most of the students in the class collectively said “yes.” Then, after a few seconds of silence to help them think about what was just said, Gina raised her hand to say, “well, it would have been a little better but there shouldn’t have been a sign.” This response seems to be indicative of the students’ inability to understand and empathize with the injustices occurring in the text. In another instance when reading this text, some students felt that what the little girl did was important because through her actions, she took a stance against segregation. However, in response to this, Alex said, “I don’t know. I don’t think she did anything good. All she did was sneak out and drink out of a water fountain.” Here, Alex is showing an inability to empathize and connect with the injustices portrayed in this text. This seems to represent Alex’s lack of prior engagement in discussions about race and ethnicity. According to Loyd & Gaither,

parents may exhibit “colorblind approaches when discussing race (e.g., avoiding the topic or denying the existence of racial inequities)” (Lloyd & Gaither, 2018, p. 58). This lack of discussion and avoidance surrounding the topic of race, specifically for White children, is problematic because “research suggests that racial/ethnic socialization (RES) practices can increase the detection of racial bias and reduce stereotyping,” (Lloyd & Gaither, 2018, p. 58).

When reading *Those Shoes*, the students also had trouble connecting with Jeremy. When asked if anyone in the class ever had to wear shoes that were taped up because they were ripped, the class responded with a collective “no.” Carly then said, “when my shoe was falling apart I got new ones, or we had another pair of shoes I could wear.” Also, in this text Jeremy’s grandmother tells him that there’s “no room for want, just need” in regard to the family’s lack of income. However, Dan thought that this statement meant that there was no physical room in the house for more things. When speaking with his neighbor Dan said, “there’s no more room in the house, so if Grandma gets him the stuff that he wants, the whole house will be filled up with toys and they’ll have to get a bigger house.” In this example, Dan had difficulty understanding the concept of living on a fixed income and only being able to afford what is needed.

At the start of this study, students were hesitant to share their thoughts on topics such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. There was silence, stares, and oftentimes, when asked what they thought about the events that were transpiring in the text, students summarized what was happening in the story instead of giving their reaction and response to the text. However, as critical conversations became more commonplace in the classroom, the students developed a willingness and desire to

share their thoughts and analyze the social justice issues that were present in the texts.

*One Green Apple* was the last text read as a part of this study and the class discussion that took place during this read aloud was the liveliest and included the most students out of all of the discussions in this study. The following conversation took place when the students were asked to discuss their thoughts after reading the first two pages of the story.

Susie: “Maybe she feels kind of useless because she can’t tell anybody what she wants to say so she’s kind of just talking to herself in her language.”

Brady: “Yeah, and she might be really embarrassed because maybe she wants to say something but she doesn’t understand others and they don’t understand her, so it's embarrassing.”

Gina: “She could also be frustrated because she’s trying to say something to the teacher but she can’t because she doesn’t speak English.”

Carly: “She could also feel left out because if you don't know any of the language you can't talk to anyone so you can't ask them if they want to be your friend. It’s lonely. I would feel sad if I was her.”

Alex: “She probably feels excluded and like she had nowhere to go and no one to talk to.”

In this discussion, students were able to empathize with and understand the multiple perspectives in this text in a much deeper and more meaningful way than when responding to the multiple perspectives in the texts read at the start of the study.

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

After analyzing student written reflections and oral responses, several themes emerged from the data. First, many students problematized generally accepted beliefs and

disrupted commonplace ideas. They criticized the social injustices and inequalities present in the texts and expressed ideas that exposed the societal structures that position certain groups of people as outsiders. Second, students frequently discussed a variety of sociopolitical issues orally and in writing after each read aloud. These students reflected on religious and racial discrimination, xenophobia, and discussed their beliefs regarding the divisive nature of our country's current politics. Third, students were able to interrogate multiple viewpoints by looking for voices that are traditionally marginalized or silenced. Here, students discussed the perspectives of those immigrating to the United States, those of a low socioeconomic status, and those facing racial and religious discrimination. Lastly, students were able to recognize and correct misconceptions that they held regarding race, gender, and ethnicity. The data seems to suggest that when given the space to discuss social justice issues and examine multiple perspectives within texts, students respond to the texts in these four ways. Of these four themes, most students responded to the texts by focusing on sociopolitical issues and interrogating multiple viewpoints. Additionally, as the study progressed, the number of student responses within each theme increased, as indicated by the number of responses recorded during the last read aloud, *One Green Apple*. This suggests that through the repeated use of read alouds as a vehicle for critical conversations, students are able to advocate for silenced voices and grow in their ability to implement the components of critical literacy in their responses to the text. Chapter five presents conclusions of the study, its implications and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The research conducted in this study stemmed from a desire to improve the social awareness and tolerance of students from a primarily White district. In addition, there was a need to increase student exposure to authentic portrayals of cultures and lifestyles outside of their ingroup and determine the best way to navigate some of the tough discussions surrounding race, privilege, and societal power structures with elementary-age students.

In order to achieve these goals, previous studies conducted within the field of critical literacy were reviewed. Paulo Freire, known as the father of critical pedagogy, asserted that a problem-posing educational model, where teachers and students teach and learn alongside one another would help to develop students' critical consciousness and their ability to "perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality," (Freire, 1970, p. 17). This instructional practice allows students to engage in praxis where they not only reflect on their learning but also take action upon their realities. Critical literacy also refers to the practice of examining texts for biases, missing voices, and other social issues. Other studies conducted within the fields of critical literacy and reader's response theory have found that when a dialogic classroom discourse is enacted, students become more reflective and involved citizens within a democratic society. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to investigate how critical literacy read alouds support students' ability to demonstrate critical perspectives through the use of oral and written responses to the texts.

From here, it was determined that students in this study would engage in weekly read alouds of critical literacy texts that deliberately foreground multiple perspectives, and as a result, the primary research question of this study became: “how do third grade students respond to the multiple perspectives in read alouds of critical texts?”

Additionally, a series of sub-questions emerged. What effect does students' participation in critical discussions have on their awareness of the messages that texts communicate about power, race, and gender, who should receive privileges, and who has been or continues to be oppressed? How do critical literacy texts help students engage in discussions about social issues? How do students explore historical social justice issues through critical discussions following the reading of critical literacy texts? During the review of the literature, it also became clear that in order for students to appropriately engage in Freire’s problem-posing model of learning, they need to speak for themselves and take on the role of the teacher. For this reason, this study took a dialogic approach where students were able to steer the whole group and partner discussions surrounding each text and build upon one another’s ideas and background knowledge. Students asked and answered their own questions when responding to each text while the teacher supported the discussions as a guide on the side. Students also had the opportunity to respond to each text individually in writing.

Following the completion of this study, I conclude that when provided the opportunity to listen and respond to critical literacy read alouds, students demonstrated dimensions of critical literacy in their responses to the text including (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, and (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues. Students were also able to (4) correct misconceptions and develop critical stances



toward social justice issues. Through the students' written and oral responses to the texts, as well as the observations recorded in a teacher research journal, it became clear that while students may have started the year unsure of how to respond to texts that focused on topics such as race, gender, and societal inequalities, the participants ended the study with an improved ability to develop a critical stance when reading critical literacy texts that foreground multiple perspectives. This data suggests that giving students the opportunity to respond to these multiple perspectives engages them in Freire's problem-posing model where lessons are driven by inquiry and discussion and students take action for social justice by challenging the status quo.

The data collected in this study also suggests that the predominant category that emerged in the student responses was their ability to interrogate multiple viewpoints for the voices missing or silenced in texts. From here, they questioned the motives behind the discrimination and marginalization of certain religious, racial, and ethnic groups. The texts used in this study were a catalyst for such important discussions and through these discussions, students were able to learn from and correct the misunderstandings they had in regard to race, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative data was used in order to reach conclusions. As a result, statistical data was not collected or analyzed. This study focused on 14 third grade students in one school in one classroom. Of the students in this group, 11 were Caucasian, one was African-American and two were Hispanic. For this reason, the results cannot be generalized for all students and backgrounds at this grade and age level. However, the study does speak strongly to the benefits of using critical texts with primarily white

students. Another limitation of the study was that data on the students' racial or ethnic backgrounds and their exposure to lifestyles and cultures outside of their own was not collected. Students were not individually interviewed and the types of responses that certain students had to the texts compared to others were not analyzed. The aim of this study was to observe how students respond to the multiple perspectives in read alouds of critical texts, but it cannot make conclusions about how or why certain students were able to respond more thoughtfully to the topics discussed in the critical texts than other students. This study also did not analyze how students' race and family background affect their ability to take critical stance when reading. However, this may be an area for future research. Additionally, the study took place over 6 weeks, and more longitudinal data would need to be collected in order to analyze the long-term effects of the study.

### **Implications**

After analyzing the data accumulated throughout this study, there are several implications for teachers, administrators, reading specialists and future teacher researchers. There are implications for this study in regard to my own instruction include the continuation of regular read alouds of texts that spark critical conversations related to social justice issues. The positive results and the students' reactions to the texts suggest that providing students the time and space to respond to critical literacy read alouds both individually and with their classmates helps the students to develop critical stances toward the text including interrogating multiple perspectives, disrupting the commonplace and examining sociopolitical issues. These conversations also shed light on some of the students' misconceptions and inaccurate understanding of the inequalities and injustices present in our society. These misconceptions, as well as some of their other

responses to the texts, suggest that some of these students have limited social awareness because of their lack of exposure to those outside of their ingroup. As a result, these students seem to have difficulty empathizing with the injustices faced by certain groups in our society. However, the results of this study also suggest that when students are given the opportunity to learn and talk about race, gender, and ethnicity through classroom read alouds, they are able to interrogate multiple viewpoints and see beyond the lifestyles and belief systems of their ingroup. Moreover, being able to regularly respond to critical literacy texts and the injustices portrayed in these texts, supports students' ability to empathize with and advocate for marginalized groups by taking action for social justice.

Within my school environment, an implication could also be that more teachers engage in critical conversations with their students on a regular basis. I could share my study and its conclusions with my colleagues through a professional development so that they can include critical literacy read alouds in their instruction and develop an understanding of how to navigate the critical conversations that surround these texts. The results of this study suggest that in schools that are not very diverse, it is especially important that students are provided the opportunity to interact with texts that authentically portray various racial, ethnic and religious groups so that students are exposed to those outside their ingroup and are then able to recognize and address injustices present in our society today. Providing students the opportunity to discuss race, gender and ethnicity through read alouds seems to help students correct their misconceptions and develop a better understanding of various racial, ethnic and religious groups. Additional longitudinal data would be needed to determine if developing this

understanding through the use of critical literacy practices helps the students to become more tolerant and accepting.

At the start of this study, I was unsure of how 3rd graders would handle discussions regarding race, religion, gender, ethnicity and social injustices. Were they too young and inexperienced to understand such topics? I was pleased to find that at this grade level, students are ready for such conversations. Using picture books as a vehicle to have these discussions and doing so in a setting where students feel comfortable and know that their thoughts are important and valued played a large role in helping students to broaden their view of other lifestyles and cultures, as well as correct any previously held misconceptions. It is my hope that by using authentic critical literacy texts regularly in the elementary classroom and providing students the opportunity to adopt a critical perspective when responding to texts, students will become more tolerant and accepting of those that are different from them. Going forward, I anticipate that the extended use of critical literacy practices like those used in this study will create a more socially aware generation that is willing and able to advocate for social justice.

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